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17. Author's Note

Welcome!

Hey guys! Thanks for pressing on the book!

I've been really wanting to do this for a very long time! But before I start, I want to say that the characters in this story DOES NOT BELONG TO ME. The Erin Hunters wrote it, and it belongs to them.

So, here's the whole...summary of the story: What if Spottedleaf did not die during the Great Battle, and still lived in StarClan? If you guys don't know, Firestar has died and gone to StarClan... AND if you have read the Apprentice's Quest, this won't be a SPOILER for you, but if you haven't...

SPOILER:

Sandstorm died.

I know. Sad. 😢 Now, what happens when Sandstorm joins StarClan and...

Get the idea? :)

~Jayhow 😉

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1

Firestar felt his life ebbing away as lightning struck the fallen beech tree beside him and flames lapped at his body. But he was ready to go to StarClan-especially when there was a beautiful medicine cat waiting for him. He felt his body fall to the ground, and everything blacked out for a moment.

Suddenly, something stirred inside him and his spirit stepped out of his body.

"His spirit is leaving," Jayfeather murmured somewhere behind him.

Firestar flexed his muscles-he felt young and energetic. Sweeping his gaze slowly around his Clan, he met every one of their gazes, lingering on Sandstorm's.

"It's time to go," Bluestar breathed.

Firestar dipped his head to Brambleclaw, then leaned down and touched his muzzle to Sandstorm's. Their eyes met, and Firestar saw all the grief in Sandstorm's eyes. He returned the look, but sadness still bloomed in her eyes as he turned and followed the StarClan cats out of the hollow.

As Firestar soared upwards, he replayed the moment of terror when he had seen Sandstorm underneath the claws of a deadly cat-Mapleshade. But then Spottedleaf had leaped in a second before Sandstorm was struck. She flung Mapleshade off, and Firestar heard Mapleshade taunt Spottedleaf.

Spottedleaf's eyes filled with grief and pain for a moment, and then she spat venomously, "There was nothing to steal. Sandstorm made him happy!"

Mapleshade lunged at her. Spottedleaf rolled under the warriors

weight, paws flailing as she fell. It was almost the end of her as Mapleshade raised her paws when she hesitated. At that same moment, Sandstorm got to her bearings and barrelled against the Dark Forest cat. Mapleshade was beaten two to one when Firestar joined her. Mapleshade hissed but retreated into the bushes. Firestar then turned to Spottedleaf.

"Spottedleaf! Are you okay?" He rushed forward, and Spottedleaf gazed at him with a knowledge he never knew she possessed in her eyes. She got up and dipped her head to him.

"I'm fine. Sandstorm is not." She said quietly.

Firestar blinked, then turned to a limping Sandstorm and bent over her. "Sandstorm-" he was broken off when Spottedleaf's sweet scent overlapped him.

"I'll be waiting, my love," she whispered in her melodious voice.

Firestar jerked his head up in surprise, but Spottedleaf was gone. He looked again for her, but Sandstorm's pained hiss made him look back down at his mate. "Sandstorm, are you okay?" He had asked worriedly.

The memory dissolved as Lionheart nudged him. "Hey, welcome to StarClan." Firestar looked up and saw the beautiful forest. Prey scuttled in the undergrowth, and the sun shone warmly here. The sun ray's filtered through the canopy, and Firestar enjoyed the rays of the sun beating down on him. The cats were all gathered in a clearing, and he quickly claimed a nest underneath an oak tree. "Settle in," Lionheart said as he glanced in amusement at Firestar. "This place is calling our Clearing." He informed Firestar as the former leader settled down. Once he had laid down, he found himself searching for a cat...But who?

Then remembered the cat he was searching for. A very special cat.

"Where's Spottedleaf?" Firestar asked immediately.

Lionheart let out a loud purr. "So eager, eh?" Then he waved his tail towards the beautiful tortoise-shell she-cat a few meters away.

She was talking to Silverstream.

Firestar turned towards her and ran forward. "Spottedleaf!" He purred loudly.

Spottedleaf's head turned and her gaze filled with happiness when she caught sight of him. Flicking her tail to mean that the conversation was over, she padded over to him. "Firestar," she murmured. "Welcome to StarClan." She purred, glancing up at him with adoring eyes.

Firestar blinked down at her and gave her a lick on the ear. "I'm so glad you could welcome me to StarClan. You almost didn't make it, but Sandstorm saved you." Firestar felt a cloud of sadness overshadow him when he remembered his mate.

Spottedleaf's tail twined with his, and Firestar allowed his heart to release a little. Right now, he could enjoy Spottedleaf's care and kindness. Sandstorm could wait. Besides, Sandstorm was well on her own. The Clan could take care of her, unlike Spottedleaf. Spottedleaf needed someone to be there for her, and Firestar set a strong mindset to be that special someone. Firestar touched his muzzle with Spottedleaf's, and the cloud was gone.

"Yes. Sandstorm." Spottedleaf's eyes clouded with jealousy, he thought, but it was gone almost a second later. Maybe he imagined it. "So, where's your nest?" She asked brightly.

Firestar pointed over to the oak tree. "There."

"Oh, my nest is there." Spottedleaf waved her tail towards a nest on the opposite side of the clearing. "Can I sleep with you for tonight? To welcome you?" She asked innocently. Firestar blinked, he never remembered Spottedleaf being so...so... "Well?" She prompted, breaking his thoughts.

"Er-sure!" He purred, tightening the twine with her tail.

"Perfect. For now, I want to show you something." Spottedleaf purred, licking Firestar's cheek. Firestar excitedly bounced, "Follow me." Spottedleaf broke away from him, and Firestar felt a cold

sensation where she had just been a heartbeat before.

Firestar raced after her, not wanting to lose sight of her. *I'm not going to lose her now!* He thought. Then he shook himself and reminded himself that this was StarClan. Spottedleaf would always be here, and he will always be with her.

Wait, what? Firestar blinked, shocked at his thoughts. Just then, Spottedleaf stopped and looked back at him. "Are you coming or not, slow slug?" She darted back and playfully hit his nose.

Firestar purred, "Of course. Don't call me that!" He licked her nose, and she twitched her ears in surprise, then it melted to pleasure. When Firestar turned away to walk on, her expression of pleasure turned to delight.

I'm getting him. By the time Sandstorm joins StarClan, he won't even be noticing her! She thought, *This is where I lost him. But I will get him back. This is for all the time I was up here while he was...frolicking with that sandy good-for-nothing she-cat!*

Author's Note: Hope you guys liked this chapter! More to come. I changed the words a bit from the original book- The Last Hope. What do you think of it? Do you think Spottedleaf can be really that evil? No offense to those Spottedleaf lovers out there! I would love to hear everyone's opinion, though. :) Oh, and I made up the name Clearing for the clearing where Firestar made his nest. I'm not sure what name it is called, but I remember it was mentioned in one of the Warriors' book. If you do know the name, let me know!

~Jayhow

2

Spottedleaf caught up with Firestar and the two cats walked side by side, flanks brushing. "It's great to be with you again." Spottedleaf murmured softly. Firestar glanced down at the pretty tortoise-shell cat, and nodded.

"Yes," he agreed.

"I never really got to be with you in the old ThunderClan camp," Spottedleaf added. Her heart bloomed with envy and impatience, but she gazed up at Firestar with adoring, beautiful eyes. She summoned all her kindness and expressed it in her eyes.

"Well, aren't you getting to know me now?" Firestar answered back, looking deep into her kind eyes. He breathed in her sweet scent, and unconsciously their tails twined together. "Spottedleaf?" He pressed when she didn't answer him.

Her eyes were sad and she looked down at the ground. She shuffled her paws and broke away. "I'm sorry I was never such a good friend. I-I should have been there with you, but destiny did not permit. But now, if I did live long enough to see you join StarClan, maybe fate wants us to be together now," she whispered. "Oh Firestar, I'm sorry." She sighed and closed her eyes.

Firestar curled his tail and touched her cheek, "It's not your fault, Spottedleaf. Anyways, I'm here now. With you. There's nothing to be sad about." He licked the fur between her ears gently. "Now, what was it you wanted to show me?"

Spottedleaf got onto her paws, and sprinted across the ground towards a different direction. Firestar, a bit startled at how suddenly she sped away, quickly gathered his thoughts and raced after her. *What was wrong with Spottedleaf?* He thought. This was not the normal she-cat he adored and liked, almost loved. Although he hated to admit it, Spottedleaf was up to something.

Spottedleaf finally stopped at the edge of a small pool. She glanced back at Firestar and meowed gently, "Come, Firestar." Firestar, relieved that Spottedleaf was acting a bit more normal, padded towards her. He sat next to her and curled his tail around her body. "Look into the pool," Spottedleaf said.

Firestar looked into the pool and gasped. He was looking over the whole Clan territories from a bird-eye view. "It's...it's the Clans." He said.

Spottedleaf purred and laid her head on his shoulder. "Yes, yes it is. Firestar, I never stopped looking after you as you led ThunderClan. I'm so proud of you."

Firestar glanced down at his friend and licked her ear. "Thank you, Spottedleaf. I'm honored that such a kind cat was watching after me." He purred, and then remembered Sandstorm. "Is there anyway to check on Sandstorm?"

There it was again! Spottedleaf's eyes darkened, then it cleared as she nodded quickly. "Of course!" She purred. "I'm sure Sandstorm's fine." She glanced into the pool and tapped on the ThunderClan side. It zoomed straight into the woods, and Firestar quickly recognized it.

"We're near the old Thunderpath!" He exclaimed.

Spottedleaf leaned forward and mewed in her sweet tone, "Camp."

The pool zoomed once again towards the hollow. Firestar looked around, and saw Sandstorm talking with Graystripe. His heart warmed as he saw his mate and best friend. Then he noticed Brambleclaw talking quietly to Jayfeather. "Is he going to the Moonpool tonight? To meet StarClan?" Firestar asked curiously

"Yes." Spottedleaf nodded. "And you said something wrong there."

Firestar cocked his head in confusion, "What?"

"Brambleclaw's going to meet *us*."

~.~

Firestar stepped back and watched as Bramblestar faded from view to return back to the Clans. Happiness blossomed in him. ThunderClan was in good hands. He turned and padded out of the clearing. He headed back to the Clearing and met Spottedleaf there.

"Do you want to go on a walk?" He asked, not ready to go to sleep yet. He was anxious to tell someone about his problems.

Spottedleaf nodded and gracefully leaped to his side. *So graceful...* He thought. "What do you want to talk about?" Spottedleaf asked in her soft meow, nuzzling him. He returned the nuzzle, and then a memory was stirred from the back of his mind. He remembered doing the exact same thing to a special cat...the cat who stole his heart. Sandstorm.

What was he doing with Spottedleaf? He was betraying Sandstorm, that's what. Firestar stepped back. He needed to clear his mind. This wasn't betraying Sandstorm! It was...it was...being friendly. Spottedleaf needed this. And she was his best friend. Nothing more, nothing less.

Firestar managed to shoot a kind smile to Spottedleaf, "It's okay. Go back to my nest and sleep. I'll join you later." He mumbled, then turned and ran away. He just needed time to think things through!

With an aching heart, he realized he needed Sandstorm more then ever.

Author's note: Hi there! :) Hope you're enjoying this story so far. I know, I know, an overload of Spottedleaf and Firestar's parts together...So for a start I'll write about Firestar thinking of Sandstorm in the next chapter. Sorry for the short chap, too!

3

Firestar did not know where he was, but eventually he stopped running when his muscles screamed in agony and tiredness. He was panting heavily when he looked around. He was beside a river. Closing his eyes, he laid down and let the sun beat down on him.

Immediately his vision was filled with Spottedleaf, Spottedleaf, *Spottedleaf*. Then Sandstorm's face floated across all of them, blocking out his other love's face. "Sandstorm..." He groaned, feeling his heart thump faster and tighten with unbearable pain and grief.

He let his emotions take over him until it was too overwhelming. He wanted to talk to Sandstorm, but how?

His mate had always held a flame to Spottedleaf, but now that candle was waxing. What was wrong with him? Firestar's thoughts battled in his mind. Spottedleaf could never replace Sandstorm, no matter what. *I need to get out of this.Why can't I just be a normal friend with Spottedleaf? I mean, she's a nice cat and all, but Sandstorm...*

"Firestar?"

Firestar jerked his head up in surprise. His thoughts snapped to the back of his mind, but it overshadowed him anyways. "Y-yes?" He asked, sitting up.

A beautiful blue-furred she-cat padded next to him and sat down. "Are you okay?" She asked quietly, gazing across the water.

"Yes. I'm fine." Firestar answered back, trying to cover his shakiness.

"Are you thinking about Sandstorm?" Bluestar pressed gently.

Firestar sighed. Bluestar was such a better leader then him. How could he have led the Clan for so long? "Don't think depressing thoughts, now." Bluestar said a little more sternly, but kind all the same. "Now, tell me what's wrong."

Firestar blinked and looked down at his paws. "Sandstorm's my mate, you know that. On the other paw, there's something about Spottedleaf. It's...frustrating. I feel like I'm betraying Sandstorm."

Bluestar's eyes grew sympathetic. "Ah, I understand." Then her eyes hardened when she mewed, "But...you don't regard Spottedleaf...more then just a friend, right?"

"Of course! I would never think Spottedleaf as anything more. Never ever." But even as he said that, he saw Spottedleaf's warm amber eyes blinking across his vision, and doubt suddenly grew in his mind. But before he could dwell on that doubt or squash it, Bluestar broke through his thoughts.

"Then that's fine. Of course you can spend time with Spottedleaf. It's not like you're betraying Sandstorm or anything." Bluestar purred comfortingly and laid a tail over his shoulders. "Just remember Sandstorm is your partner and Spottedleaf is just your friend."

Just your friend. Of course! Firestar dipped his head at Bluestar. "Thank you, Bluestar."

"Now go get some sleep. It's the middle of the night." Bluestar said, pride rising in her chest when she gazed at him. Once again, she was glad that she had brought Firestar in all those seasons and moons ago.

Firestar sighed and turned back to the river. He laid his head on his paws and mewed, "Alright, Bluestar. I just need to think through everything for a moment."

"Of course. Joining StarClan can take a toll on a cat. Don't worry, you'll get used to it." Bluestar mewed, then she padded away.

Firestar enjoyed some peace and quiet before someone pounced on him and pushed him into the river. "Hey!" He gasped as he swallowed a mouthful of water. Before he could look up to see his attacker, the cat leaped onto him and joined him in the river.

He drowned for a moment, then realized that the river was just below his shoulders. Embarrassed a bit, he looked around. There was no cat there. He scented the air but the water had washed away almost all scent. Clenching his jaw in annoyance, he started to get out when some water splashed him. A loud purring erupted from further down the river when he jumped and fell back into the river.

Poking his head out, he could finally see who the cat was. She was silhouetted in the moonlight, but those clear amber eyes were evident. She was beautiful.

Firestar's breath was taken away. "S-Spottedleaf?"

"Firestar. Why do you doubt me?" Spottedleaf's cheery eyes suddenly dulled.

Firestar looked down at his paws. "I'm sorry, Spottedleaf. It's just that I can't just betray Sandstorm-"

"Yes, that I understand. But did you think that I was playing with you when I said those things in the forest? Well, I was not!" Spottedleaf's eyes darkened with hurt. "Did you not take anything seriously?"

"Of course I did, Spottedleaf!" Firestar said desperately, but controlled his voice to keep it from a wail. "You're my best friend, but we can't be anything more."

"I understand." Spottedleaf's small fire died out and shame took over. Timidly and softly, she asked, "Do you really find me frustrating?"

"Of course not!" Firestar exclaimed in shock, then swam through the water to stand in front of her. "Of course not," he repeated.

Firestar turned and leaped onto the river bank. Spottedleaf followed suite and leaped to his side. They both shook their fur out,

but she shivered and closed her eyes. "What's wrong?" Firestar asked as she puffed her fur out, crouching on the ground. Her eyes were mere slits.

"C-cold." Spottedleaf chattered through her teeth.

Firestar twitched his ears in worry. He pushed away any doubt that Spottedleaf was pretending. Goodness, he worried too much nowadays! Firestar crouched down next to Spottedleaf and curled his tail around her body. Licking her fur the wrong way, he tried warming her. Spottedleaf purred thanks.

When she was warm enough, she got onto her paws and shook herself. "Thank you, Firestar." She purred.

"No problem." Firestar said, and they made their way back to the Clearing. Curling up under the oak tree, he finally slept off without doubt or fear. "It's StarClan. Nothing wrong can happen."

Author's Note: Okay, okay. Sorry it's short. And also, I HAD to write about them together. This story is basically about these 3 cats! :) Well, not Sandstorm yet, but...soon! Hang in there! First person to comment ever on this story? Holly-heart. First person to vote? Beca46. Thanks guys! :) Hope you liked this chapter!

4

[image]

It had been a few seasons after Firestar had joined StarClan, and the two cats had grown closer.

Firestar yawned as he uncurled from his nest, stretching. Spottedleaf stirred beside him and yawned. "Who-?" She sat up quite suddenly, not quite believing that her love was in StarClan and was right next to her! But while she sat up, she accidentally knocked Firestar's head back.

"OW!" Firestar yowled.

Whitestorm and Snowfur looked up from eating their fresh-kill.

Firestar rubbed his chin and looked at Spottedleaf with an amused expression. "Oops! Sorry, Firestar." Spottedleaf raised her head and licked his ear fondly. Spottedleaf turned and said, "I'll make up for it by catching us something..." Spottedleaf disappeared through some bushes and came back almost a heartbeat later with a squirrel in her mouth.

"Here." Spottedleaf dropped the squirrel in front of Firestar. "Eat."

Firestar gratefully bent his head and started eating. Eventually he stopped and nudged the rest of it to Spottedleaf. "There, your part."

"No thank you. You must ravenous!" Spottedleaf's eyes twinkled with happiness and laughter.

Firestar found himself lost by looking deep into her mesmerizing eyes. Suddenly it softened when it caught sight of Firestar looking at her, and Firestar thought she was lost in his eyes as well. He stepped one paw-step forward, and distantly he heard himself say, "No. I insist."

Spottedleaf almost blushed-if that was possible-but held eye

contact. "Nah, you eat it." She replied back.

Firestar stepped closer and their flanks brushed.

Abruptly Spottedleaf grabbed the squirrel and ran away. "Hey!" Firestar called after her, a purr rumbling inside him. He chased after her. Finally he caught up, stretching his muscles when she slowed down for a bit near a hill, getting a better grip on the squirrel. He crashed into her, and they rolled down the hill, purring uncontrollably.

They finally stopped rolling down the hill and landed on their four paws. Firestar was panting from exertion and suddenly realized Spottedleaf was eating the squirrel. "Hungry," Spottedleaf explained when Firestar looked at her, amazed.

Firestar purred, and touched his nose with hers again. His tail found her tail and they entwined it together. Firestar rested his muzzle on her head.

"Firestar?" Spottedleaf asked timidly.

"Yes?"

"Do you want to see how Sandstorm is coping?" She asked.

Firestar felt touched. *Spottedleaf was caring? She's such a sweet cat, I'm starting to like her...*He thought, then shook himself. *No.Sandstorm's my mate.But Sandstorm wasn't here, while Spottedleaf was. He could just spend time with Spottedleaf, couldn't he?* "Of course." He purred back at Spottedleaf.

Spottedleaf quickly padded out into the clearing where the pool was. Firestar leaned forward and touched ThunderClan's territory. "Camp," Firestar breathed into the pool.

It zoomed into the hollow, and Firestar searched the camp with his eyes for her. "Where is she?" He asked curiously. He knew she went to the elders den, but...Graystripe and Purdy were the only ones outside the elders den. Panic begin to bloom in him. "Where is Sandstorm?" He yowled into the sky.

Spottedleaf crouched beside him, looking into the pool. Her eyes became distant, and then suddenly, with a gasp, came back to StarClan. Turning urgently to Firestar, she looked deep into his eyes and said, "I'm sorry, Firestar. She's beyond StarClan's reach. But just previously, she joined a group of cats on a journey to SkyClan. I can locate her, though."

Firestar widened his eyes and glanced disbelievingly at Spottedleaf. "What?"

"Yes. I will walk in her dreams-"

"No, I'll do it. I've been a terrible mate. I haven't even been checking on her!" Firestar said quietly.

"Are you sure?" Spottedleaf twined her tail with his and squeezed it comfortingly. "She'll understand if I walked in her dreams and told her you were...busy."

Firestar said, "I know you want to, but-"

"No, no, no! I will go. Anyways, you're not really used to walking in cats' dreams."

Firestar circled Spottedleaf, his eyes suddenly unsteady and fierce. He was judging Spottedleaf for his mate. Could she be trusted? His heart thumped, weighing the options...then suddenly his eyes softened. "Okay, Spottedleaf. Send my regards! Tell her I'll be visiting her soon."

Spottedleaf dipped her head, about to answer when she felt something slip over her head. She looked down at her neck in surprise to find a necklace made from twigs, leaves, and feathers. "Oh, Firestar! This is wonderful!" She purred.

Firestar touched his nose to her ear warmly. "Your welcome, Spottedleaf."

Spottedleaf purred and licked his cheek, then licked her chest, embarrassed. She glanced at Firestar and he looked back. "Well, you should probably get ready for tonight." Firestar said.

"Yes. Tonight." Spottedleaf purred.

~.~

Spottedleaf curled up next to Firestar and went to sleep.

She traveled through StarClan's hunting grounds, right at the edge, and tried to find Sandstorm's dreams. She remembered the feeling of jealousy the last time she walked in Sandstorm's dreams, and now she braced herself.

"Sandstorm!" She called out. The background shimmered and disappeared behind her. Spottedleaf was in the middle of Fourtrees, and Sandstorm was on top of Highrock, gazing up at the stars. "Sandstorm," Spottedleaf forced her voice into a soft, comforting mew.

Sandstorm started and swiveled her head towards the medicine cat. "Oh! Hi, Spottedleaf." Nimbly she jumped onto the ground and padded over to Spottedleaf. "How's Firestar?" She asked immediately when she reached Spottedleaf's side.

"He's fine enough without you." Spottedleaf said. "Anyways, I came here to warn you of your...heartbreak when you come to StarClan."

"What?" Sandstorm asked, a little taken aback. "W-What do you mean heartbreak?"

"You see, Firestar...Firestar's fallen in love with another cat."

Sandstorm's eyes widened. Betrayal and pain flooded in. "No, Firestar...Firestar won't do that." She said quietly. "You're lying!"

"Would I?" Spottedleaf challenged softly, and stroked her flank gently. "Oh Sandstorm, so naive. Don't you wonder why he isn't here to walk in your dreams? I know you're suffering from your injury, Sandstorm. I just wanted to warn you so your heart will be able to withstand the pain further on."

Sandstorm looked away, not believing Spottedleaf's words. *Firestar won't betray me!* She thought. Then she took in Spottedleaf again. She had...she had a necklace on! In fact, it stank strongly of

Firestar... Tears pricked at her eyes. *How could Firestar betray* me*?*

"Thank you, Spottedleaf. But I-I will see for myself later on." Sandstorm said, accepting the fact that she'd be nearing her end soon. But she had to see Firestar again...soon. "Can you tell Firestar to visit me tomorrow night?"

"Okay," Spottedleaf whispered, and licked Sandstorm's left ear. "I'm sorry, Sandstorm. Firestar..."

"It's okay!" Sandstorm suddenly said fiercely, turning her blazing green eyes on Spottedleaf. "It's okay." She said more softly.

Spottedleaf turned away from Sandstorm, delight blooming in her.

~.~

"Spottedleaf? Spottedleaf? How's Sandstorm?" Firestar asked worriedly, shaking the tortoise-shell awake.

"Oh, Firestar! She's fine...She's just a little upset about her shoulder. It's wounded, but other then that, she's good. She would want to see you, though. If she's acting sad or weird, just assume that she has a lot on her mind right now." Spottedleaf said, stretching.

Firestar relaxed. "Good. I'll visit her tomorrow night."

"Oh, and you must be a bit more...fiercer than usual. Don't ask her anything about her shoulder. She's very touchy on that subject," Spottedleaf said, worry shining in her eyes. "Okay?"

Firestar nodded, "Thanks, Spottedleaf." He licked her nose and sat close to her, curling his tail around her body fondly. "You're a nice ma-friend," he quickly corrected.

Spottedleaf laid her head on Firestar's shoulder. Pleasure and excitement tingled in her paws when she thought of the next few days. *After that, Firestar will be mine!*

Author's Note: Hey there! I just loved the details on the picture

above! :) It was drawn on DeviantArt, I found it in Pinterest. Here's the longer chapter I promised, and I hope you enjoyed! Don't forget to tell me your thoughts! Don't like Spottedleaf's new side? Take pleasure in seeing Spottedleaf crush Sandstorm? Hoping Spottedleaf will fail and Sandstorm will win? Well, let's see! :)

5

[image]

Firestar's background shimmered and faded away, replaced in a desolate, empty land. Sandstorm was sitting in the middle of the plain land, tail wrapped around her paws. Love, relief, and grief overwhelmed Firestar and he staggered forward to her side.

"Sandstorm?" He asked, smelling her sweet, familiar scent.

"Hello, Firestar."

Firestar remembered Spottedleaf's words and remembered not to ask about her shoulder...and to act a bit more fiercer than usual. "Hi, Sandstorm." He said, eyes trying to blaze up.

Sandstorm's eyes blazed back with even more fury, and Firestar stepped one paw-step back in shock. "Um, Sandstorm, are you-" He stopped himself. "What's wrong?" He asked instead, unable to hide the softness inside him.

"Absolutely nothing at all." Sandstorm's eyes hardened. "Firestar....Thanks for visiting me here tonight." Her eyes softened, and...was that water in her eyes?

Firestar pressed his flank against hers in a comforting way, and she lingered, but broke away. "It was nothing. I wanted to visit anyways."

~Sandstorm~

Sandstorm looked down at her paws. Now he was lying! She remembered how his eyes had tried blazing with fury, but melted into softness. *He was a liar! A terrible liar. When his 'fury' didn't work, he was trying to worm his way into me by softness!* Sandstorm thought furiously. She kneaded the ground. "Firestar, I just want to say whatever your decision is in StarClan, I will accept it."

Although she choked the words out, she knew she had to do it. Firestar was choosing Spottedleaf over her. Usually she would fight for him, challenging Spottedleaf, but now she knew that she had been fighting the truth for too long. Firestar had always liked Spottedleaf, and now that they were together...Sandstorm had no place anywhere in Firestar's heart. No place to belong anywhere near this cat.

Sandstorm felt a sharp stab in her heart when she gazed back at Firestar. He reeked of Spottedleaf. She almost curled her lips back in disgust, but she then realized that her muscles were still tensed, ready to fight. She released, not realizing that she had held her breath until now.

She released it and gathered her thoughts. Now she knew the truth, she would accept it. She was tired of fighting and arguing for Firestar. Firestar needed to make his own decision now, and he has chosen. *I just wish he will tell me straight-out, instead of making me experience the shock, pain and betrayal waiting for me in StarClan*.

Suddenly snapping back into reality, she heard Firestar say just in time, "What do you mean?"

Sandstorm glanced up. She had just submitted, saying that she had accepted Firestar's decision, and he's trying to fire the subject up again?

He's a terrible mate. Wait, no. He was a terrible *cat. How can he play my heart? When he knows it aches so much already?* Sandstorm felt fury and hatred burn in her.

"Stop playing games with my heart!" Sandstorm spat. She was crouched in her fighting position now, not believing that her...her...best friend was trying to hurt her.

~Firestar~

"Stop playing games with my heart!"

Firestar's eyes widened in shock. Suddenly Sandstorm was crouching in her fighting position, fury and pain pronounced in

every way she moved as she took a step forward. "W-what?" He asked, confused.

When there was no answer, Firestar realized: Sandstorm was being such a dramatic cat! Spottedleaf had warned him that she would be cranky... "If this is about your shoulder, stop acting like that!"

Sandstorm's face tightened with even more fury now. "Please...Just tell me outright! Stop trying to hide it, Firestar. Do you know it hurts?"

"What is it that you don't see? I live my life the way to keep coming back to you, everything I do is for you!" Firestar hissed back, getting knotted up with confusion and frustration. What was wrong with Sandstorm?

"I should've known from the start." Sandstorm loosened her muscles, her fury disappearing.

"Sandstorm, please. I don't understand what you're saying." Firestar said, forcing himself to sit down. "Let's talk things out. I can see that you have a different perspective from me."

Sandstorm's heart bottled up with anger again, and she lashed her tail furiously. "Firestar, there is nothing to explain. If you don't want to tell me outright, I'll just say it. I accept whatever decision you want to choose, okay? Goodbye. I hope our paths do not cross again."

Firestar was bewildered. What did she really mean?

But just as he was about to ask, unable to comprehend the rest of the words she had said, the background and Sandstorm started disappearing. He stretched his paw out. "Wait!"

Without a word, she turned her back to him and disappeared with the background.

Firestar sighed and padded back to StarClan's grounds. On the way he met Whitestorm, who noticed his somber expression. "Hey, are you okay?" Whitestorm asked.

"Huh? Oh, ya. I'm fine." Firestar did not manage to give a smile, and later on he gave up. Thankfully Whitestorm did not press the subject, only mewing if Firestar needed to talk, search for him.

Firestar and Whitestorm reached the Clearing and separated their ways. Firestar searched for Spottedleaf immediately. When he didn't see her, he frowned and padded towards the clearing where the pool was. Bending his head, he touched the tip of surface and it shimmered. Instead of showing the Clans' territories, it showed a farm.

Firestar immediately recognized it as the way to SkyClan. Excitement bounced in him when he saw Sandstorm emerge tiredly from a camouflaged den, but then he saw her limping and felt his excitement die down.

It was quite bad-herbs was stuffed into her wound, but Firestar knew it didn't really help. She winced every time she used her leg, and her eyes were shallow and without any of the fury from her dream.

Instead it was tired, and full of pain. But it wasn't pain from her wound.

Firestar dipped her head in sorrow. He had caused his love's pain, and he wondered whether Sandstorm was only trying to live so she wouldn't see Firestar as early as she can. "Sandstorm..." He murmured.

A noise of a breaking twig startled him, and he accidentally tipped over and crashed into the pool. Panic flooded him when he realized he was drowning. Just as he lost his breath, he landed on his four paws in a sunny field.

Glancing around, he recognized the farm and quickly headed over where he last thought was the place where he saw Sandstorm. Firestar spotted Alderpaw's pelt-

"Woof! Woof!"

Firestar froze in shock and fear. Sandstorm!

"Sandstorm!" He yowled. No way could his mate survive dogs! Fur tingling with starlight, he flew across the field to where the dogs were. He spotted them-one small yapping one and a huge black dog. Snarling, he slashed at the big dog's nose and led them away.

Firestar sprinted across the field, in between some sheep legs, and leaped onto a fence. The dogs scrambled beneath him, but when a Twoleg appeared and shouted for them angrily, they obediently padded back to it.

Firestar felt his heartbeat in his ears, and relief flooded him when he realized Sandstorm would be safe now. He turned his head and saw the journeying group of cats, following Sandstorm's sandy pelt until she disappeared out of sight.

"Firestar?"

Firestar jumped and barely managed to keep his balance on the fence. "Spottedleaf?" He mewed, turning to face the beautiful tortoise-shell she-cat.

"What are you doing here?" Spottedleaf licked his nose in greeting and purred as she rubbed her head against his neck. "How was your visit with Sandstorm?"

Firestar sighed and rested his head on her. "Oh Spottedleaf. It was horrible...She acted differently, said something about accepting whatever decision I chose. Do you know what she means?"

Spottedleaf ducked her head, hiding her pleasure on her face. Yes! Sandstorm had given in.

"Spottedleaf?" Firestar asked, wondering why Spottedleaf was hiding her face. "Do you know why?" He suddenly felt hope in him, but it died down when Spottedleaf looked up at him with sympathy in her eyes.

"No, I'm not sure, Firestar. But I have an inkling..." Spottedleaf closed her eyes. "Nah, it's nothing."

"No! Really, tell me." Firestar said worriedly. "Please."

"If you insist." Spottedleaf said, and Firestar nodded eagerly. "I think she means she wants to...separate from you. You know, break up." She said gently. "Did she say anything about her heart? Pain? Grief?"

Firestar felt shocked. He was...stunned. "S-Spottedleaf..." He shook his head, "Sorry, just give me some time to comprehend." His paws were weak, legs wobbly. He leaped down onto the ground, landing wobbly. Spottedleaf leaped gracefully down beside him.

"Yes. Yes, she said something about her heart," Firestar said when he finally regained control of his muscles. "Spottedleaf, does she really mean that?"

"I think so. But please, don't jump over conclusions-" Spottedleaf said, breaking off when Firestar curled his tail around hers fiercely. She could see fury blossom inside him.

"If she wants that, she can get that. *She* was playing with my heart. *She* betrayed me. I stayed loyal and true to her...and then, and then-"

"Calm down, Firestar. What are you going to do now?" Spottedleaf purred kindly, stroking his cheek with her tail.

Firestar bent his head to align his eyes with hers, and his eyes flashed with an emotion she was too slow to catch. Excitement burst in her when he leaned down and licked her cheek.

But he did not say what she wanted him to say. Instead all he said was, "I'm not dumb."

Spottedleaf's eyes flashed with shock as she gazed into his eyes. It had hardened into fiery green ones. Spottedleaf broke into a purr at how her love was acting. *So innocent...*

"I know."

Author's Note:

Wow. The story is a bit fast-paced, hope you don't mind. It's gonna be kinda short. Okay, anyways...Here's the little scene

between Firestar and Sandstorm when ThunderClan's former leader visited her in her dreams that night. The song attached to this chapter is: Quit Playin' games with my heart from Backstreet Boys. Check it out!

~Jayhow

6

Firestar blinked in surprise. She knew?

Suddenly his world crashed down around him. His body shut down as his mind buzzed with thoughts and confusion. He took a deep breath. He had meant that he was not dumb...well, he knew Spottedleaf was playing with him...

But...how? How can he be sure? And for Spottedleaf to admit it so easily...

He lashed his tail in frustration and turned to Spottedleaf. "What did you say to Sandstorm that night?"

Spottedleaf let a look of surprise and kindness slip over her face. "Why, Firestar, are you doubting me?"

"Just answer my question!" Firestar snapped impatiently.

Spottedleaf purred and curled her tail around her paws. Gently she said, "I told her that you were worried and would like to see her tomorrow night. I also asked her how was her shoulder, knowing she was hurt."

"She said something about decision." Firestar answered back sharply.

Spottedleaf took her time, and said coolly, "I do not know what she meant of that. All I know of that is by guessing, which I have already told you of."

Firestar's fury extinguished. How could he have doubted Spottedleaf? Sweet, nice Spottedleaf... It was Sandstorm's fault! Then he rethought again.

After all these years of being her mate, didn't he know her well enough that whatever she said had truth behind it? That she was as sharp as a flint, and chose her words carefully. Also, she made her

decisions perfectly and well-thought of...

And him?

Nothing.

All he did was depend and depend. Firestar looked down at his paws. But couldn't he trust Spottedleaf as well? Except...he never knew what happened between the two she-cats during their meeting. Frustration gnawed at him. Then he looked up tiredly at Spottedleaf.

He would just go with the flow. He badly wanted to talk to Sandstorm but knew that she did not want to cross paths intentionally with him ever again. "Okay. Let's go back to StarClan, Spottedleaf."

Spottedleaf licked his cheek, "It's okay, alright? I'm here. Don't ponder on this anymore. Sandstorm can make her own decisions."

Firestar managed to give Spottedleaf a tired nod before they padded up into the sky and into StarClan. But not before Firestar looked back down and spotted the tiny group of cats against the horizon, silhouetted in the setting sun.

~.~

Firestar padded over to the river and lapped a few mouthfuls of water before he laid down beside it, staring into the river. Sighing, he glanced up at the sky and just relaxed for a second, clearing out whatever had happened in the previous days...

Firestar was again reminded of Sandstorm, and he groaned in annoyance. Why couldn't he stop thinking about her? *Why?* They were OVER.

Firestar stood up and tried clearing his thoughts by taking a walk through the forest. Spottedleaf was somewhere visiting the medicine cats that had visited StarClan that day, and Firestar was grateful for the space to breathe.

He padded into a clearing and sat down, breathing heavily. Just

then, there was a rustle in the bushes and Littlecloud appeared. He looked puzzled and confused, but when he looked at Firestar warmth filled his eyes. "Oh, hello Firestar! Can you tell me where is ShadowClan? No one was here to meet me."

"In StarClan we roam in each other's borders. I'll help you find Runningnose." Firestar said, standing up and stretching. He led Littlecloud to a small, unused path.

The oak trees were ancient and stately, their branches meeting over the middle of the path. The sun was out, and golden rays pierced the interlaced branches overhead, casting a vagrant warmth. It warmed their pelts as they padded side-by-side towards a boggy patch of ground where Firestar had last seen ShadowClan eating their meals. "So, how's life in ShadowClan?"

"Perfect! Except Needlepaw had to run off without telling her Clanmates where she is. We're worried about her. Some of the ThunderClan's cats has also journeyed off somewhere, including Sandstorm." Littlecloud added, not knowing of the split between the two mates. He brightened as he thought of something, mewing, "Hey, can you help see whether Needlepaw and the rest are alright?"

Firestar blinked at the old cat. "Um, of course! Of course I can. Needlepaw is fine. I just checked on them a few...a day ago." With a jolt he realized that it had been so short a time.

Littlecloud purred and said, "That's great, Firestar. Thank you."

They reached the clearing and Littlecloud spotted Runningnose at once. "There he is! Thank you, Firestar." Littlecloud nodded at the former leader and walked slowly towards Runningnose. Firestar sighed. Littlecloud was so old! It was his time to join StarClan, and yet he didn't have an apprentice yet...

Firestar turned and just wondered through the forest, blocking out his thoughts and just concentrating on the view.

Firestar had been walking for some time until he finally reached the borderline of StarClan. Beyond it was a black, dark forest.

Firestar knew what it was. The Place of No Stars, or the Dark Forest....There was many names to it.

Firestar turned away in disgust when he heard a tiny mew.

"Can you please help me?"

Firestar looked up, surprised. Then he saw Mosskit, Bluestar's kit stuck in a tangle of brambles. "Mosskit, what are you doing here? Where's Bluestar or Snowfur? I thought they were supposed to be-"

Mosskit sighed impatiently. "Firestar, please get me out."

Firestar stared at her. "Tell me why you're out here alone."

Mosskit groaned, then reluctantly said, "Fine. I-I ran away from them. Okay? Swiftpaw and I were playing hide and seek when I got stuck in these brambles! Anyways, I'm allowed to roam about. This is StarClan! Nothing bad can happen to me here."

It can. It can hurt so bad. Firestar thought inwardly, and his heart wrenched painfully. Gently, he untangled the little kit and she gratefully licked his paw. "Thanks, Firestar!" Then she bounced off.

"Please be careful!" Firestar said, looking fondly at the energetic kit. Mosskit looked back, her eyes sparkling.

"I will....as best as I can." She blinked cheekily, then raced off before Firestar could call her back. Firestar rolled his eyes at the boldness of Mosskit, then turned back to look at the black expanse of the Dark Forest.

Finally, when he realized the sun was almost rising, he headed back to the Clearing.

Spottedleaf was waiting there anxiously, and Firestar could obviously see her relief when he appeared. "Firestar! There you are. I was searching everywhere for you. Here, eat." Spottedleaf nudged a thrush towards Firestar.

Firestar pushed the thrush away and gazed deeply into Spottedleaf's eyes. "Spottedleaf, I need you to promise me this."

Spottedleaf blinked in surprise, then nodded cautiously. "Okay. What?"

Firestar touched his nose to her ear gently. "Promise never to leave me again, okay? Or to ever lie."

Spottedleaf purred softly and licked his muzzle. Then she blushed and grabbed the thrush in her jaws. Dropping it at his paws, she nodded firmly at it. "Eat."

Firestar ate the thrush hungrily. After eating, he yawned and asked Spottedleaf to go on a walk with him.

Firestar and Spottedleaf walked together under the shady trees, enjoying each other's company and the fresh breeze. Firestar twined his tail around Spottedleaf and said, "Can we stop here? I-I just wanted to watch the sunset with you."

Spottedleaf purred and pressed her flank with his. "Alright."

Author's Note: Ooh, things are going to be messed up in the next chapter! :) Sorry for the very late chapter...Hope you enjoyed, though it's kinda boring. See ya'!

7

[image]

Sandstorm knew her time was up.

She grumpily allowed Alderpaw to smear her wounds with a delicious-smelling poultice, but her heart ached inside. It was time to face Firestar.

Opening her eyes, she found herself in a beautiful meadow. The golden rays filtered through the canopy, warming her pelt instantly. For once, Sandstorm forgot her worries or even Firestar as she enjoyed her youthfulness and StarClan.

Then she saw her father Redtail. "Sandstorm?!" He exclaimed, waving his tail to call Brindleface.

Brindleface was basking in the sun with her friend Dappletail when he called. She glanced up in surprise. "Oh! Sandstorm, my dear!" She purred, standing up and hurrying over.

Sandstorm purred and nuzzled her mother, then greeted her father by pressing her nose to Redtail's. "How are you?" She asked, a feeling of joy spreading in her. Her world doesn't really revolve around Firestar. She had her family, after all! She forced the feeling of despair whenever she thought of Firestar, but Brindleface immediately spotted it.

"We're great, but really, what's bothering you?" Brindleface asked, licking Sandstorm's ear fondly.

Redtail sat down and touched his tail to her shoulder. "Yes. Tell us."

"Well," Sandstorm sighed. "It's just that Firestar and me are not really...on good terms now."

Redtail's eyes darkened in protectiveness for his kit. "Yes. Firestar's

been hanging too long around Spottedleaf." Then he shook himself and pressed his flank against Sandstorm. "Never mind, Sandstorm. This is StarClan. Forget it!"

Brindleface gave a him a stare. No cat could just ignore their mate in *StarClan*.

Redtail purred and licked Brindleface's cheek. "Okay, I guess you can't just ignore them. Just confront him, alright? Find out the reason why he's been acting like this."

Sandstorm wrinkled her nose. "Redtail, I have already spoken to him. I don't want to speak to him again."

"Whatever you want, Sandstorm. He's your mate. Just try to confront him again, alright?" Redtail meowed gently, then continued, "Promise?"

Sandstorm glanced at Brindleface for help. She really didn't want to speak to Firestar again, but Brindleface had an expectant look on her face. She obviously agreed with Redtail. Sandstorm rolled her eyes and got to her paws. "Alright, alright. I promise. Let me just get a bite. I'm really hungry."

Redtail and Brindleface nodded in pride at their daughter, then padded over to a rock to lie down and bask. Sandstorm sighed and first marked her nest under an oak tree. She realized there was also another nest made on a nearby root, but she didn't really care to check the scent. Sandstorm padded into the forest and her scent glands immediately caught a whiff of Firestar's scent.

Mixed with Spottedleaf's.

Hatred and anger filled her whole body, almost making her stumble. She blinked and looked down at her paws for a while, controlling her emotions. When she looked up again, she spotted a hare sniffing in between the grass.

Excitement bounced through her and she crouched.

She pounced but was a heartbeat too late.

The hare spotted her and bolted off. Sandstorm snarled in frustration, but enjoyed the feeling of swiftness that she had not felt for a long time. She chased the hare easily, but when she started nearing it and was about to pounce, she smelled a very familiar scent. A heart-aching one that she wanted to smell from the day he had joined StarClan.

Firestar!

She ignored her beating heartbeat and the rising anger. She crept over to the scent, abandoning the hare. Then Sandstorm stopped, for she smelt Spottedleaf.

How dare she?

Sandstorm thought angrily, then remembered: she had broken up with Firestar. She was about to turn away when curiosity overcame her. Sandstorm padded forward softly, pushing between the bushes until she reached a bush that hid her view from the two cats.

Sandstorm crouched behind the bush and peered through a hole that allowed her to see through.

Firestar and Spottedleaf was sitting next to each other, their tails entwined together. Jealousy burned in her, but sadness bloomed as well. *I have given up all that*, Sandstorm thought bitterly. *It's my fault and my choice. Nothing involving Spottedleaf.* Sandstorm hesitantly let that idea seep into her mind. *Not involving Spottedleaf....* and yet Sandstorm knew something was up. Something involving the pretty medicine cat.

Tears stung her eyes, and Sandstorm quickly blinked. She glanced at the two lovers again. They were staring at the sunset. She crept closer, wanting to hear what Firestar was murmuring in Spottedleaf's ear.

Firestar leaned in, licking Spottedleaf's cheek. "Spottedleaf..."

"Ya?"

"Thank you so much for showing the way." Firestar said, then sighed. "I was too blind to see that Sandstorm was just tricking my

heart. How could she betray me? You're so much better. You can never lie."

Sandstorm felt pain stab through her heart as she heard those words. Her claws unsheathed and she kneaded the ground in anger.

"I knew it was you before her. When I first entered ThunderClan, it was you I was always attracted to." Firestar murmured, his eyes warming and softening.

Sandstorm's anger and fury blinded her. An ache at the back of her eyes made her blink to clear it, and then she stormed through the bush. Her back was arched and bristling. "Firestar!" She snapped, her tone coming out more sharper than she expected it to.

Firestar's head whipped around. Relief, shock, and pain flooded his eyes at that moment. "Sandstorm! I-I..."

Sandstorm seethed with disgust, and she stood right in front of him, glaring. "Did you really mean that?" She said quietly, her tone dangerous.

Firestar tightened his twine with Spottedleaf. "Yes." He said firmly.

Sandstorm once again felt her heart break. She was too vulnerable to her love. She still loved him. Sandstorm sighed, letting all her anger and hurt pour out. But when she glanced up, her eyes were sharp and unforgiving. "Well then, now do you understand what I mean? I'll let you have her. I'll let you never have me again, always nagging and annoying you. Is that what you want?"

"N-No..." Firestar stammered, again shocked at her sudden turn of emotions.

"*Isn't* that what you want?" Sandstorm asked, impatience now in her tone.

Firestar sighed and mewed, "No, Sandstorm. I just want to talk things out. I need you, I know that-"

"No!" Sandstorm stepped back. Her eyes blazed once again. "You

first said you loved me. Whatever happened to those words back then? In ThunderClan? Vanished in the past few days. I asked you whether you really meant what you said-that Spottedleaf was always your first love and that I was never one. You said yes, that's true. Now you're trying to crawl back to me? Cheating on Spottedleaf like when you cheated on me?"

Her emotions were violently roiling in her belly, almost making her retch. But she held it in.

Firestar's eyes hardened. "Do you know what you put me through? Sandstorm? I'm so confused right now. You refuse to ever talk things out to me. You are also my love, Sandstorm. But right now, you're not acting like that cat I used to love!"

"What, you expect me to be all lovey-dovey? To allow you to go with Spottedleaf while I blink in agreement and encourage you to go after her? To abandon *me*?" Sandstorm snapped. "Don't even talk about your hardships, Firestar. You abandoned me. Each night, every day. I waited for a visit...a murmur...*something* to show that you were there supporting me! But what did I get?*Nothing*. You weren't ever there for me, Firestar. What can I say?"

She blinked furiously to control her tears, then continued, "And then when Spottedleaf appeared in my dreams and told me what to expect when coming to StarClan...Please, Firestar. I had had enough. How can you?"

Firestar looked down at his paws in embarrassment. It was true. He had never been there for Sandstorm. Never been guiding her.

Sandstorm mewed, "I even reached out to Jayfeather and asked him to talk to you. Tell me news. All I got was when Jayfeather went to StarClan and asked where you were, he was always replied by the same thing: He's off somewhere with a she-cat. Can you imagine hearing that?"

Firestar closed his eyes. "Enough!" He snarled. He turned to Spottedleaf. "Please get out of this situation. This does not involve you."

"Oh yes it does. There are some unsettled business to tend to." Sandstorm broke in, glaring at the she-cat.

Spottedleaf looked frenzied, but Sandstorm could see she was faking it. She could always see. But Firestar was terrible at seeing through the mask...

Sandstorm pushed the thought from her mind. Right now was between Firestar and her. Nothing with Spottedleaf except why she hadn't told Firestar of her visit after the night Firestar had visited Sandstorm.

Spottedleaf sat down and licked Firestar's cheek worriedly, "Alright. If you want, I can stay here and settle some...unsettled business."

Firestar glanced gently at Spottedleaf, though there was a tint of annoyance in it. "Yes, please stay here to join in with the conversation."

Sandstorm eyed Spottedleaf suspiciously as the medicine cat took her seat next to Firestar, not even bothering to hide that she loved him. Spottedleaf lovingly twined her tail with his and licked his muzzle occasionally. Sandstorm wanted to snarl, but held it in.

She could be a good cat, but when it came to Firestar...

She was not that kind of cat.

How was it? Too overwhelming? Well, I'll be happy to know your thoughts! For now... :) See ya'!

~Jayhow

8

Spottedleaf licked her paw and cleaned her whiskers. Although she showed her frightened look outside, she was calm inside. Almost delighted. But even when she felt like that, there was also a strange feeling.

Nervousness.

Why would she feel like that? Was it because of Sandstorm's glare?

Spottedleaf blinked and kept her feelings down. Her plan was going on fine. What was there to worry about? She stared at Firestar. Was she really going to risk her kind reputation for him? Was it worth it?

Yes, she told herself firmly. Sandstorm did not deserve Firestar.

"Well?" Firestar asked, curling his tail around Spottedleaf fiercely. A shiver of pleasure rippled through her.

Spottedleaf could tell that Sandstorm was controlling her anger and disgust. "Well. Before I leave you with her, I need you to tell me why you were acting like this. When I was still in ThunderClan and you were here in StarClan. Betraying me." Sandstorm said, her eyes staring straight into Firestar.

Firestar replied back smoothly, "I never wanted to be with Spottedleaf in StarClan, Sandstorm. I kept reminding myself that you were my mate. But..."

"But?" Sandstorm prompted.

Firestar faltered, "I-I failed. I did give in to Spottedleaf, but I still

loved you Sandstorm."

Sandstorm laid her tail over her paws. "Alright. But then...But then why didn't you just visit me? Was it so bad that you even *forgot* me?"

Firestar sighed. "That was my mistake, and I repent. Will you please forgive me and give me another chance?"

Spottedleaf couldn't help but curl her lips back in disgust. *Firestar! What was he doing*? Spottedleaf mewed for the first time, "Firestar...Aren't you with me?"

Nobody seemed to be paying her much attention.

Sandstorm cut in, "I'm sorry, Firestar. I can't. There's too much words that you have said to Spottedleaf that I don't know about. And, well... you wanted Spottedleaf just now, didn't you?"

Firestar kneaded the ground in frustration. "Sandstorm-"

"Look, just go with Spottedleaf. I'll save you the trouble. My heart is not a toy to be tossed about." She stepped up to Firestar and licked his muzzle, for maybe the last time. "Goodbye, Firestar."

She turned to Spottedleaf. "Don't play him, you understand? And I think you should tell him what you told me that night. I've kept it a secret for too long. Now that everything's through, you can tell him."

Firestar pricked his ears, eyes curious. "What? Tell me what?"

Spottedleaf's heart was crushed. She had hoped that Sandstorm would not mention it...That was the only flaw in her plan.

Spottedleaf tried to stay calm as she turned to Firestar. She purred sweetly, "Well..."

Firestar tilted his head. "Well?" He mewed.

Sandstorm was obviously still recovering from leaving Firestar, and so did not notice that there was something wrong. Spottedleaf

tried willing her to go away, but she stayed, waiting patiently for Spottedleaf to explain.

"As you know, I visited Sandstorm." Spottedleaf said, trying to take her own sweet time.

Sandstorm cocked her head, copying Firestar's movements. Her sharpness was returning, and Spottedleaf knew that her time was almost up. "That night I told her that you had been distracted."

Firestar nodded. "Yes, I was. Well, that's that-"

"Wait."

Spottedleaf turned to Sandstorm. Suspicion burned like a flame in her eyes. "That's not all. Spottedleaf, would you care to tell more? After all, no keeping secrets."

Spottedleaf fought back the rising urge of despair and anger at Sandstorm. How could that sandy she-cat be so cruel? Then she remembered what Sandstorm was giving up. Her mate. Her *life*.... "Alright then, I asked her about her shoulder and told her what to expect in StarClan. Also that you would want to visit her tomorrow night."

Firestar nodded, then suddenly he stopped nodding. Confusion flashed across his face. "Wait, what is it that Sandstorm had to expect in StarClan?"

"That you were being distracted." Spottedleaf mewed back smoothly, relieved that the conversation was almost over-

"By?" Sandstorm urged.

Spottedleaf blinked. *No more hiding.*

"By me."

9

[image]

Firestar's heart almost stopped beating. "What?" Was the only word he could choke out.

Spottedleaf remained calm while Sandstorm raged, glaring at her and looking at Firestar occasionally. Spottedleaf lashed her tail. "Please, calm down."

Firestar just felt stunned. Everything had progressed so fast...

"Spottedleaf...What do you mean?" Firestar asked. "Did...Did you plan all this?"

Spottedleaf looked up at Firestar with genuine sadness in her eyes. "Firestar..."

"Just answer me. Please. These few days...they've been so messed up I don't know what's the truth anymore!" Firestar growled. He felt exhausted suddenly, but deep inside a fire burned. That fire was the only thing that was keeping him awake.

Spottedleaf crouched down and laid her head on her paws. She sighed, then mewed, "I...I did plan all this, but I didn't mean it!" She sat up enviously, gazing into Firestar's eyes.

Firestar looked away. He could not bear to look into those beautiful amber eyes. "Firestar," she breathed softly. She leaned forward and was about to murmur more words when Firestar took a step forward, away from her and towards Sandstorm's side.

Firestar looked up and caught Sandstorm's gaze, but Sandstorm stepped back as well. "I meant what I said, Firestar." Sandstorm said quietly, her eyes clouded with grief. "Whatever I said still holds. Goodbye." Sandstorm turned and started walking away, breaking

into a run soon.

Firestar bowed his head and turned back to Spottedleaf. "How could you?" He whispered, then turned and ran into the forest, chasing Sandstorm.

Sandstorm cried as she ran through the forest. Hunger gnawed at her, finally making her stop and hunt. She hunted down a blackbird, but as she stared at it, she suddenly didn't feel like eating it. But sighing, she knew it was good for her. Sandstorm bent her head and bit into the blackbird. As she chewed the stringy meat, she could taste her saliva mixed in it.

Once she had eaten and thought things out a bit, her mind cleared. Right now she had broken up with Firestar...that's all! She was free- no worries, no hopes.

She entered a sort of gorge, where she slowed her pace down to look around. There were rock walls that rose up on either side of her, with every now and then a tiny stream tumbling down miniature waterfalls and running away in a little channel carved into the side of the road. In that dim light grew only mosses and bearded lichens, trailing dull greens down the sheer face of the rock walls. Her paw steps were the only thing to be heard in the small space as she padded through it, staring around wonderingly. She enjoyed the silence, but a small hole opened in her heart.

She stopped for a moment, trying to wonder what it was. Oh. Loneliness. Sighing, she shook the feeling off. She had her parents and litter mates... Ferncloud had joined StarClan already. Happiness shivered through her when she thought of her half-sister.

She was taking a deep breath when there was a shout.

"Sandstorm!"

~Firestar~

Firestar managed to see Sandstorm's tail disappearing as she entered a gorge... He increased his pace until he stood at the entrance of it. Sandstorm was wondering along the tiny path,

looking around. Love warmed his heart as he saw his mate there. She was indeed happy, more free. Without him.

He hesitated. Should he let Sandstorm go? Or should he call out for her? Chase her...?

He decided the latter. He raced forward, an object of fire, flashing through the dim light. When he neared, he called out "Sandstorm!" and slowed down.

Sandstorm turned around, her whole body facing him. Surprise broke through her thoughtful and happy expression, but her gaze darkened when she met his. Her tone was even and precise as she replied,"What is it, Firestar?"

"I-"

"Anyways, it's great to see you here, Firestar. Bramblestar is leading ThunderClan well, but seeks guidance from you. He would deeply be grateful if you would visit him." Sandstorm continued coolly.

Firestar was a little annoyed and frustrated at how she was acting, then remembered that she had meant what she had said. They lived different paths now. He composed himself and lifted his head taller. "I will, in due time."

Sandstorm dipped her head at him. "Is there anything else you wanted, Firestar?"

Firestar nodded. "Actually, yes. Sandstorm, will you please join me on a walk?"

Sandstorm flinched, unable to hide her feelings. She masked her feelings once again, then mewed, "Alright." She padded forward and joined Firestar in that small space. Their flanks brushed, and they headed out of the gorge. "What did you want to talk about?"

"Us." Firestar said softly, going straight to the point.

~Sandstorm~

"Us."

The word was a sudden shock to her, and she almost stumbled, as if a cat had pounced on her. Sandstorm breathed in and out before replying. They had stopped walking, and Firestar waited patiently as Sandstorm gathered her thoughts. "What about us?" She asked sharply, with an edge to her tone.

Firestar pressed his flank against hers, but she moved away. Firestar pushed down the rejection and mewed, "I'm sorry, Sandstorm."

"Sorry's doesn't catch anything." Sandstorm snapped. She was very tentative on the subject, and being tough and sharp was the only way to keep her from breaking down. Firestar knew her-he wouldn't mind...she hoped.

Firestar tolerated her anger quite well, and Sandstorm glanced at Firestar with a bit of a rare gentleness she hadn't shown him for the past few days. But just as Firestar caught it, it disappeared again. *I can't let him into my life now! It's just...not right! I will withstand the loneliness. Spottedleaf was a test for him, and he failed to overcome it. How can I give him a chance?* She thought fiercely as she waited for Firestar to answer. All her life, she had always wondered whether Firestar still loved Spottedleaf. She remembered the time she had started to bristle in the quest to SkyClan where Firestar had mentioned that Spottedleaf had been visiting him in his dreams...

She could remember what Spottedleaf did at that time...the medicine cat had comforted her by telling her that Firestar *does* love her, and even if she stayed alive in the forest, he and she could never be.

But little did Spottedleaf or Firestar know; when Spottedleaf was about to leave, Sandstorm heard what she had said to Firestar-that sometimes, she would've given anything for things to be different, as though wishing that she had not been a medicine cat, but instead, Firestar's mate. Jealousy battled with acceptance, and then Firestar spoke.

"Won't you give me a chance?" Firestar whispered.

"Haven't I always given you chances?" Sandstorm mewed back.

A tense silence hung in the air around them, and Sandstorm could almost hear the crackles of tension. "Anyways, the decision has already been made. You get to have Spottedleaf. Whatever happened after my decision is your problem, not mine."

"But it wasn't my fault, Sandstorm! Spottedleaf broke us apart." Firestar said.

Sandstorm turned to him and mewed softly, "She tried and she won. If you had really loved me, you wouldn't have failed to overcome her." She twisted her head to look forward, and padded forward.

~Firestar~

Despair and desperation rose in Firestar as he allowed Sandstorm to walk ahead of him. He was about to call her back when he finally allowed in what he had been fighting all this time.

Loneliness was a powerful feeling, pressing down on him as he replayed the thought rolling continuously in his mind.

He had already lost the cat that he loved.

Author's Note: Hi there! Terribly sorry, I really like ending chapters with cliffhangers. :) I might not be able to update that often in these two weeks. Exams coming up... :(Well, I hope you enjoyed this chapter. The song attached up above is Show me the Meaning by Backstreet Boys. Until next time,

~Jayhow

10

[image]

For once, Firestar blamed Sandstorm.

It was always him that was forced to crawl to Sandstorm...Well, actually that wasn't *entirely* true, but during the past few days that had happened. Firestar hardened his heart and hunted a squirrel down.

If Sandstorm was lonely, she would come back to him, not him to her.

No, not anymore.

~Sandstorm~

Sandstorm found a quiet spot, then looked around to check whether anyone was nearby. After scenting the air, she then yowled loudly in anger and pain. *Why did this have to happen to me?* After venting out her emotions, she took a deep breath and replayed all the happy memories of her and Firestar.

Just when she reached the end of one particular funny one, Bluestar appeared from the surrounding undergrowth. Her eyes were soft and understandable, and she touched noses with Sandstorm in greeting. "Greetings, Sandstorm. I see you have joined StarClan as well. I'm sorry I wasn't here to greet you when you joined StarClan in the beginning, but I had business to do; and I expect you did too."

Sandstorm sighed and kneaded the ground. "You know about Firestar?"

Bluestar touched her nose to Sandstorm's ear comfortingly. "Yes, Sandstorm. He told me of his problems, in fact. I did not broach the subject." Bluestar said, sitting down calmly in front of her Clanmate. "Do you want to release your feelings?"

"Ya-"

"Oh boy." A voice interrupted Sandstorm, and both she-cats' looked up to see Yellowfang standing there. "Is it about Firestar?" Yellowfang asked sharply.

"How'd you guess?" Sandstorm said sourly, though she was faintly happy to see the old cat.

Yellowfang padded nearer and sat down a little distance from them, but still in ear shot. "Well then, I will listen to this."

Bluestar rolled her eyes, "Yellowfang..."

"What?" Yellowfang said grumpily, challenging the leader, and Sandstorm purred at how the former medicine cat was acting. Yellowfang gnashed her teeth and stubbornly stayed there. "I will listen and no one's going to change it."

Sandstorm looked straight into Yellowfang's eyes. "And I suppose you have experienced this feeling before to make you this interested?"

Yellowfang faltered slightly, and her barrier of pride crumbled a little. "Yes." She murmured softly, closing her eyes as she remembered Raggedstar and...and... Her barrier reinforced again. "Yes. Anyways, I'm the perfect councilor for you. Go on!"

"This is unusual," Bluestar commented, eyes sparkling with amusement and fondness for Yellowfang.

Yellowfang shot them with a piercing glare that did not allow further delay, and Sandstorm began.

When she had finished, she glanced around to see the older cats' expression. Yellowfang's eyes were clouded and her gaze was distant, but Bluestar was present. Her eyes were pitiful but angry as well.

"I never knew Spottedleaf could do this." Bluestar said softly, "But for love, that is possible." Her eyes softened even more as she thought of her past, and didn't realize that Sandstorm had flinched

at those words; Sandstorm felt hatred overcoming her thoughts once she heard Bluestar.

Didn't *she* deserve love? *Spottedleaf is so selfish...*

"Spottedleaf is not as selfish as you think, though." Bluestar said, reading Sandstorm's thoughts. "You cannot have known how long she has been walking StarClan, waiting for Firestar. The battle in the Dark Forest was a narrow escape. Can you imagine?"

Bitterly, Sandstorm accepted the truth, but dark thoughts still raced through her mind. "Yes, I can imagine. Everyday in ThunderClan without Firestar was agony. But when I lived in ThunderClan with him, I had to always wonder whether he loved me or Spottedleaf more. Well now we know." She paused, then continued, "At least Spottedleaf got to visit him in his dreams..." She choked in grief, then cleared her throat and composed herself. She continued, "Whereas Firestar didn't care to check on me."

"Maybe he did." Bluestar mewed gently. "I spoke to him, you know."

Sandstorm sighed and laid her head on her paws. "Everything's just so confusing. I keep on having these emotions, over and over again. It's tiring and wearing me out. I thought this is StarClan. Everything should be perfect!"

"No."

For once, Yellowfang was back again. Her tone was full of grief, pain, and anger. "StarClan can never be perfect for it is overshadowed by one thing and one thing only."

"What is that?" Sandstorm asked curiously.

Yellowfang looked down at her paws and the conversation with Yellowfang was over. She was lost in thought once more. Sandstorm looked inquiringly at Bluestar, but the former leader shook her head. She would not tell Sandstorm anymore as well.

She pushed away the frustration of the cats. Why did they always speak in riddles? Might as well speak nothing of a subject when not

wanting to complete it. "What should I do about Firestar?" Sandstorm changed the subject, begging Bluestar. She rarely showed this side of her, but when she began, she could hardly stop.

Bluestar sighed and twitched her ears. "That is what you have to decide yourself, Sandstorm. You are an attentive and intelligent she-cat, Sandstorm. You can figure something out. Firestar has decided his move. What is yours?"

"Wait. What?" Sandstorm wondered. What was Firestar's decision?

Maybe to move on without me, Sandstorm thought sadly. She shook her head and glanced at Bluestar. "I-I too have already made a decision, and I have told Firestar that. I can live with it." She mewed, raising her sandy colored head defiantly when Bluestar stared at her with a *'really?'* look.

"Whatever you think, Sandstorm. But ask yourself this-is that decision really true?" Bluestar said, standing up and stretching.

"I can withstand the loneliness." Sandstorm mewed back, not allowing the doubt she really felt to enter her voice.

"Whatever you choose, Sandstorm. But remember what I have told you." Bluestar said, and nudged Yellowfang. Yellowfang was jolted out of her thoughts, then nodded at Bluestar.

"You go first." The former ThunderClan medicine cat mewed hoarsely.

Bluestar left, and Sandstorm glanced at the old she-cat. Yellowfang twitched her ears, then stood up. Sandstorm thought she was also going to leave, and so she stood up as well. She turned away, but then there was a presence beside her.

Yellowfang's voice murmured in her ear, "Don't make the same mistake as I did. Give Firestar another chance."

Then the medicine cat was gone.

Sandstorm closed her eyes and listened to the bird song. *Give him another chance.* The words lingered in her mind, rocking her to

sleep.

Author's Note: Amazing. I still have time to write two chapters in a day. With my exams coming up. DX I guess I just wanted a break... See ya'!

~Jayhow~

11

What did I do wrong?

Spottedleaf wondered, her head light and seeming in the clouds. She couldn't believe it. Now she was labeled a liar and...a selfish cat, and she had lost Firestar at the same time. She should have cried, should have disliked Sandstorm, but a strange sense of relief came over her when the two cats left her in the clearing.

At least Firestar didn't get Sandstorm.

Spottedleaf stood up, but suddenly wavered as a noxious feeling rose up in her. Spottedleaf hurried to a bush and vomited the disgusting food, then quickly went over to the stream to cleanse her mouth. She lapped at it while thinking. Well, thinking of Firestar.

Firestar...

She felt the heady, dizzy feeling again; Spottedleaf bent her head down and concentrated on her reflection. *Take a deep breath, Spottedleaf...*

And yet she couldn't. Something seemed to be holding her down. What was it?

She had felt this feeling, so many years ago with...with her previous love. *How foolish I am to think Firestar can replace him*. She thought grimly, and this time tears *did* spring to her eyes when she remembered her other love; her *true* love....

Suddenly a paw flung her back with such force that her breath was knocked out of her when she reached the ground. "Spottedleaf!" A familiar voice exclaimed. Spottedleaf couldn't move. She just lay down there, watching the sky as the clouds swept across it. The cat

came closer, but was still hazy and out of her eyesight. "Spottedleaf, are you okay?"

Whitestorm.

Spottedleaf finally forced her muscles to move, and managed to sit up. She turned her brilliant amber gaze onto Whitestorm. The handsome white tom looked back steadily, eyes dark with worry for his Clanmate. "Are you okay?" He repeated slowly.

Spottedleaf blinked, confused. Then finally she nodded. "Yes..."

"Are you thinking of Firestar again?" Whitestorm asked gently.

"No," Spottedleaf mewed truthfully, still thinking of her previous love. "Why did you push me back? It was a very strong push."

"You were going to fall into the river, Spottedleaf. You were tilting towards it. Did you not know?" Whitestorm was confused. Usually Spottedleaf was alert...now she just looked distant and cloudy. "Spottedleaf, are you sure you are okay?" He repeated.

"I'm fine. Thank you." Spottedleaf stood up and unsteadily stumbled back towards the trees. Whitestorm kept up persistently, worried for his Clanmate. "Please leave me alone, Whitestorm." Spottedleaf said, a little impatient.

Whitestorm looked offended, then dipped his head. "If you insist..."

"Go." Spottedleaf said sharply.

Whitestorm turned and walked away, leaving Spottedleaf in the sun-dappled clearing. She padded forward, heading in the direction Firestar had last went. She just needed to see what Firestar and Sandstorm were doing...

"Help me!"

12

"Mouse dung!"

Firestar hissed as he fell into a deep hole that had been covered with leaves and camouflaged with the forest floor. After calming himself, he looked around. No escape. Sighing, he cleared his throat to yowl, "Help me!"

Hoping silently that someone would hear him, he tried again, "Please! Anyone? Help me!"

When no one came, he sat down and continued yelling. It's StarClan! Why was nobody around? He called again and again until his voice went hoarse. Giving up, he started kneading the ground.

A few minutes later there was a scuffling noise. Was it a mouse?

Firestar stood up and called once again, "Hello? Anyone there? Please, help me!" The scuffling noise stopped, and Firestar lashed his tail in frustration. Just as he was about to sit down again, he started when a branch was shoved through the hole, landing just an inch from his face.

Relief flooded him as he started to climb up, but it broke halfway and he landed on the ground, paws hurting with scratches. Staring crossly upwards, he mewed, "Um, the branch broke!"

A sweet, familiar scent wafted down into the hole, but unlike before, anger filled him. "Spottedleaf!" He snapped. A cold feeling overwhelmed him, making his voice sharper and stronger.

"What is it?"

"Let me out of here!" Firestar hissed angrily.

"I don't know why you're so angry at me, Firestar." Spottedleaf replied back, poking her head over the hole. There was something wrong about Spottedleaf, and Firestar sensed that, but...

"You did a lot of things to me, Spottedleaf. Of course I have the right to be angry!" He spat, unsheathing his claws.

"And I too. You know how much I suffered up here in StarClan while you betrayed me to Sandstorm?" Spottedleaf snapped back, her voice harsh and unfamiliar. Firestar was taken aback. Did...Spottedleaf just do that? "Answer me!" She hissed, breaking him out of his reverie.

Firestar bared his teeth back. "You never seemed to mind."

"I wanted you to be happy, Firestar. Because I love you, and I still do. Why didn't you see my pain?"

"You didn't allow me to see it." Firestar replied, his hackles slowly falling as Spottedleaf's voice grew softer and softer.

"Do you want to change that?" Spottedleaf asked.

Firestar gritted his teeth and looked away. How could he give her one more chance? He had lost two cats, and it would be safer not to have any now... But he was given a choice. At least one still wanted him. He looked back up at Spottedleaf, finally deciding.

"Spottedleaf..."

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry, but no."

Author's Note:

I'm sorry it's so short! DX My exams are over (thankfully) and I'm kinda free, but I still have a few more exams to do... so ya. I just wanted to post a chapter for those who are still reading.

Thank you guys!

~Jayhow

13

[image]

Spottedleaf glared at Firestar, and an emotion she had never experienced before stirred inside her. But before she could reply back to Firestar, there was a rustle behind her and a sandy she-cat appeared.

"Spottedleaf! Hi, have you seen Firestar? I need to talk to him..." She trailed off when she saw what Spottedleaf was doing. "Firestar? Why are you down there, and why is Spottedleaf not helping you out?"

"Sandstorm!"

Firestar's voice was taut with uncertainty, but there was a faint defiance in his gaze when Sandstorm caught it.

"Can you please get me out?" Firestar pleaded.

"Of course! I wonder why Spottedleaf hasn't got you out yet." Sandstorm said, shooting a confused glance at Spottedleaf. Now that all the jealousy and ordeal was over, Sandstorm could finally regard these two as her proper Clanmates whilst forgetting all that had happened in the past.

Marching over to a fallen branch, Sandstorm took one end of it with her jaws and tried lifting it, but it was too heavy. She judged the distance from the branch to the hole, but it was too far to drag it. The branch would inflict injuries on her paws.

"Spottedleaf! Help me."

Spottedleaf was sitting near the hole, tail curled over her paws. She was staring directly into the hole, but her eyes were fixed on nothing. "Spottedleaf!" Sandstorm called again, trying to jolt her out

of her thoughts.

Spottedleaf didn't even blink as Sandstorm snapped in her sharpest tone, "Spottedleaf, hurry up and help me! Whatever you feel is contempt for Firestar or me is *gone*. Face it, Spottedleaf!"

Sandstorm finally padded over and nudged Spottedleaf quite roughly.

Snarling, Spottedleaf finally showed some reaction. Leaping up, she twisted and faced Sandstorm. Scraping Sandstorm's nose, she caused a light wound. Blood welled out, and Sandstorm recoiled back in shock and anger.

"Spottedleaf! What has gotten into you?" Sandstorm asked, trying to keep her anger bottled in. Spottedleaf lashed her tail and closed her eyes, visibly holding her breath for...what, an outburst?

"You think you're so good, right, Sandstorm?" She spat the words out, each word laced with anger.

Sandstorm cocked her head, "No. Not every cat is perfect, and I know that. Why are you asking this?"

"Because you have no idea what you put me through, and now you're just trying to march in on me?"

Sandstorm opened her mouth, closed it, then opened it again. "Spottedleaf, I really have no idea what you're talking about. Please, do enlighten me." She said, genuine and true. Spottedleaf arched her back, fur bristling. But before she could say anything else, Firestar's impatient meow floated up from within the hole.

"Hey! Hello? I'm here, you know!"

"Firestar, I need Spottedleaf to say her feelings and get her to help me; else I'll never be able to drag the branch to help you out!" Sandstorm said, a little exasperated at her former leader.

Firestar crossly replied, "Well, can't you get another cat and after you've rescued me, talk with Spottedleaf *without* me here?"

Sandstorm rolled her eyes. "Oh, please be quiet, Firestar. It's not like you're in a rush."

Firestar slumped. "You have no idea," he muttered, but Sandstorm was now speaking. Pricking his ears up, Firestar listened.

~Spottedleaf~

Spottedleaf was slightly confused at Sandstorm's accepting and motherly way, but it was her time.... Suddenly, fixed with Sandstorm's brilliant green gaze, she lost her anger and frustration. She lost the words to speak, and the more gentle part of her blossomed up again.

Sandstorm's eyes softened in understanding. "Spottedleaf, I know what you feel like. I've had a long talk with some very wise cats"-at this a sparkle of amusement appeared in her eyes-"and I understand. Spottedleaf, you have no need to say anymore. I don't know whether you think I'm boasting, but genuinely coming from me, I promise that I'm not."

Spottedleaf sat down and regarded Sandstorm with a new light. Twitching her ears, she suddenly let out a purr. "Sandstorm, my Clanmate. I'm so sorry for my behavior." Standing up, she shook herself. "I've been...acting rather silly these past few days. Once again, I apologise profusely."

Smiling slightly, she bowed her head deeply. Sandstorm inclined her head as well, and then Spottedleaf padded over to the hole. Staring down, she caught the gaze of Firestar's sparkling emerald eyes. "It's been a wonderful experience during the time we spent with each other, but I apologise. I apologise for all my acts during the past few days, and for making your time in StarClan seem stressful when it's supposed to be enjoyable and happy. Firestar, I thank you."

Firestar tilted his head and accepted the apology with warm eyes. "Thank you, Spottedleaf. But I, too, have to apologise for causing this much trouble."

Spottedleaf purred and dipped her head, but as she did so she

whispered, "That's alright, but I truly think that the cat you need to apologise to is Sandstorm."

After a moment of silence, Spottedleaf continued again, "I'll leave you two after I've dragged the branch over. Remember, at least make an effort to talk to her now that I'm not such a pain in the tail."

Firestar purred, "You're not a pain in a tail."

"I sure was." Spottedleaf replied, then disappeared from sight as she helped lift the branch with Sandstorm. After a moment, there were three grunts as Sandstorm counted, and then the branch was shoved into the hole.

~Firestar~

Firestar stepped back and allowed the branch to dig straight into the ground. With a shudder, he felt an immense wave of relief that the branch had missed him. When he climbed out, Spottedleaf had gone. The only sign that she was here at all was her lingering sweet scent, already growing faint.

Firestar faced Sandstorm, who had lost her bravado as she faced Firestar. Clearing her throat, she said, "Hi Firestar. I know I said I wouldn't talk to you about this subject ever again, but... I have to bring it up again."

Firestar sat down and meowed softly, "Sure you can talk. I've got all day," and it was true-he did have all day. Here in StarClan, there was...not that much worries! Sandstorm smiled slightly, and...was that tears? Firestar forced himself to remain sitting, but his voice was full of worry when he meowed, "Sandstorm, are you crying?"

Sandstorm closed her eyes and shook her head. "Nah, I'm not. Let's not delay. I would like to consider us together again. Would you...accept it?"

"I don't know, Sandstorm. Our feelings are still raw, and...maybe we should rethink?" Firestar asked uncertainly, but deep inside he could feel his whole body dancing with joy. Just as the words

escaped his mouth, he realised that he might have offended her...

Instead, Sandstorm purred, "Oh Firestar, I know you don't think that. But if you want, you can rethink. I will be waiting." Standing up, Sandstorm turned around and padded away, waving her tail in farewell.

Author's Note:

Hey guys! Sorry for such a late update. (And a short chapter, too.) Thanks for waiting this long... Hope you enjoyed! :) The song attached up above is by Tori Kelly, Bottled Up. It is...kinda like Spottedleaf's feelings. :)

Until next time,

~Jayhow

14

Sandstorm could hardly believe it. She had done it! She felt as if she was floating on air, as light as a feather... "Whoa! Sandstorm," Brindleface purred as she crossed paths with the sandy she-cat. "You should watch where you were going! If I hadn't bump into you, you'd have fallen straight into that river!"

Sandstorm blinked. Although she knew Brindleface was joking, there was a tint of concern in her eyes. "Hi, Brindleface. Sorry," Sandstorm purred and twitched her ear once to show apology.

Brindleface shook her head. "It's alright, my dear. Just watch where you're going next time, okay?"

Sandstorm nodded, but lingered... "Brindleface?"

"Yes?"

"What do you think of Firestar?" Sandstorm asked. With a jolt, she realised that she had never heard her mother's point of view about her partner before.

"Oh." Brindleface sat down, eyes soft and understanding in her motherly way. "So that's what you're so happy about- let me guess, you guys are together again?"

Sandstorm shuffled her paws and looked down at them. "N-no...He's still deciding."

Brindleface gently touched Sandstorm's ear with her tail. "I've never seen you this happy for a long time, Sandstorm." She prompted, and Sandstorm finally sighed happily.

"Ya, well...Maybe there's still hope. Now, can you please tell me what you think of Firestar?" Sandstorm asked, eyes wide and

pleading. It was true, though; she had never been so happy or excited since she had become a warrior.

"Of course." Brindleface said, stretching. After yawning once, she focused her attention on Sandstorm again. "Firestar." She paused there, her gaze distant. "He came to ThunderClan as a kittypet, but has risen to the position that many cats respect him. Yes, Firestar has mistakes, but I do believe he has a good heart overall. As you know, he was named Fireheart for a reason. There are many theories of him that seasons have twisted. But we know what is the truth. Sadly, not many of our generation is left in ThunderClan. The young are foolish and brash. Firestar is brave, yes. That is true. He is also courageous, strong headed, and wise. But deep inside..."

Brindleface stared deeply in Sandstorm's eyes.

"Deep inside, he is a troubled cat. The wisdom comes from great pain, and he has made many decisions that comes from great pondering, Sandstorm. Don't be too hard on him." Brindleface mewed softly, then stood up and licked the fur between Sandstorm's ears. "Go strong, my daughter."

Sandstorm looked back up, but Brindleface's comforting presence was gone. Spirits dampened, she wondered what Brindleface meant...

~Firestar~

Firestar's tummy grumbled in hunger. Firestar rethought on when he had last eaten...

Nope, he couldn't remember.

Sighing, Firestar hunted down a mouse and gulped it down ravenously. After his belly was full, he pricked his ears and scented the air... Where was he?

Hopefully near the pool... Firestar headed off in the direction he thought was where the Pool was. After wondering around, he finally found the shady clearing where the pool glittered in the sun's rays.

Taking a deep breath, he sounded in a deep voice, "ThunderClan. Bramblestar."

Immediately the pool raced over towards the lakeside. Firestar peered closer and saw a dark silhouette sitting on the pebbles, staring out over the lake. He seemed troubled.

Firestar took a deep breath and dived through the pool. After floundering for a moment, he landed lightly on the shore. He padded over slowly, taking his time. He expected Bramblestar to look up any moment now, but the ThunderClan leader did not.

Firestar felt slightly concerned- *Bramblestar must really be deep in his thoughts if he can't hear me. I'm making noises like a badger!*

Only when Firestar was beside him, pelt shimmering with stars, did Bramblestar look up. He widened his eyes, the only sign that he acknowledged Firestar was there. A moment of silence passed between them, and Bramblestar looked back down at his paws.

Firestar touched his nose to Bramblestar's cheek in greeting. "Hello, Bramblestar. How is ThunderClan?"

Bramblestar kept silent for a moment, then broke out in agitation, "Firestar, I'm scared that ThunderClan isn't being given the proper leadership skills from me. Was I right to send the cats on the journey? I mean, Sandstorm never returned"-at this Firestar cocked his head, sensitive, but Bramblestar pushed on, not knowing who he was talking to-"the Clans are in...turmoil. Tell me, am I wrong?"

Firestar was a little overwhelmed by the speed and urgency in how he talked.

Without waiting for the former leader to answer, though, Bramblestar continued, "And then there's a problem with Squirrelflight...she's acting weirdly nowadays. "

Firestar's ears pricked up at the mention of his daughter. At last, Bramblestar died down to silence, allowing Firestar to speak. Truth be told, Firestar was a little puzzled of the news... What's happening?

Bramblestar waited impatiently, then stood up and kneaded the ground. Almost wailing, he mewed, "I knew it! I would never as great a leader as you. Firestar, why did you choose me?" Bramblestar turned to Firestar.

Firestar shook his head. "Bramblestar. You are the leader. Do you not remember what life I gave you?"

"The courage to make the hardest decisions," Bramblestar muttered, eyes downcast.

"Yes. And I trust you can do so without me being here to guide you." Firestar said gently, the leadership feeling taking over his heart again as he stared at Bramblestar. Bramblestar relaxed slightly, affected by Firestar's calmness.

"Yes, but-"

"Being a leader is not easy, you need to take time." Firestar purred, and then waved his tail, "By the way, what's wrong with Squirrelflight?"

"Well, Jessie's gone, and Squirrelflight has our kits...I don't think that's the problem." Bramblestar said hesitantly, knowing that he was talking to her father.

"I'll speak to her." Firestar said. "For now, take a rest. It isn't good to be tired when your Clan needs you."

"Ya." Bramblestar yawned, and Firestar looked on as he slowly trudged up the slope. Just as he was about to go out of eyesight, he turned back and yowled, "Thank you!"

Firestar dipped his head in acknowledgement, then he in turn returned back to StarClan.

Author's Note:

Hello everybody! :) I especially wanted to publish another chapter as fast as I could because of a person who's given me the motivation to do so! The profile is... JoJo_524! Thank you, and have a great day! :D

To those who are still reading, thank you as well. I really appreciate it. :) So, what's wrong/great about this chapter? I'd love to hear your opinion!

Also, another reminder, this is a short story, so... it will probably end in a couple more chapters unless I make it into a longer, more complex story. What do you think?

Yours,

~Jayhow

15

It was a splendid day.

Dew coated every surface, and even more dew dripped from the leaves of the tall, old trees. Sunlight filtered through the canopy, casting its brilliant light in different shades across the forest floor.

Heart bursting with happiness, Sandstorm made her way towards the clearing. A necklace of leaves and beautiful, sweet-smelling jasmines hung around her neck. Sandstorm increased her pace as she neared the pool.

Firestar was there, his pelt neatly groomed and smoothed down. When Sandstorm approached, his ears pricked up, but his eyes were still glued to the surface of the shimmering pool. "Sandstorm," he greeted coolly.

Sandstorm purred, "Firestar."

Finally Firestar looked up, eyes glowing in happiness and excitement. "I see you're...ready," he said.

Sandstorm nodded, dipping her head. As she and Firestar sat back and prepared to summon the cats, she felt happiness burst into her once again as she remembered the moment when Firestar and Sandstorm had got back together again.

-Flashback-

Sandstorm watched silently as Firestar approached her. "Can we...go to Flowering Meadows? To talk?"

Sandstorm stood up after nudging the mouse that she had been eating towards Ferncloud. "Sure."

Brindleface gave Sandstorm a sidelong glance, and then nodded at her daughter. Once doing that, she turned back to Mousefur to talk. Sandstorm followed Firestar whilst passing Feathertail and Silverstream,

and then they arrived in the beautiful meadow.

Grass waving in the wind, Sandstorm found it hard to focus on Firestar's form: Flowers of different colours grew among the grass, attracting butterflies; Sandstorm found herself distracted, but when Firestar leaped on a large rock, concentrated and joined him.

Circling, she made her spot warm before she rested there with a contented sigh, staring across the meadow. Firestar sat silently beside her, a nervous expression on his face, but after a while he took a deep breath and said, "Sandstorm, I want us to be together again."

"Oh?" Sandstorm asked, twisting her head to meet his gaze, eyes sparkling with happiness and amusement.

"Oh yes." Firestar said, purring as he pushed her off.

"Hey!" Sandstorm yelled, mock fury driving her to leap up on the rock and push Firestar off, but Firestar ran off before she could. "Come back here!" She shouted, purring as she caught up to Firestar easily. Firestar quickened his pace, but Sandstorm was too fast. Putting her paw out, Sandstorm managed to trip him. Pouncing on him, Sandstorm pressed him down with her weight. "Give up?"

"Never!" Firestar yelled back, pushing her off with his hind legs...

-End of flashback-

Firestar was calling, looking at Sandstorm expectantly. "Well...?"

Sandstorm took a deep breath and stared into the pool. "Alright." Taking a step, she dived straight into the pool. Tumbling, she landed on the grassy hill. Breath taken out of her, she took a moment to breathe in and out... just before Firestar landed on her, making her breath come out again.

"Oops. Sorry," Firestar laughed, stepping over to give her space to breathe.

Sandstorm sent him a mocking glare, then glanced around. The ThunderClan camp!

Sandstorm glanced at Firestar. He was making his way towards the hollow, and Sandstorm hurried to catch up.

Painful but joyful memories flashed across Sandstorm's eyes as she brushed against the honeysuckle bush that covered the entrance hole. Inside, the cats were still sharing tongues when they noticed the two StarClan cats.

Alderpaw was sitting with Jayfeather, and when Sandstorm's gaze fell on him, his eyes brightened in delight. "Sandstorm!" He called, and Sandstorm dipped her head towards him in a friendly and warm way. Turning away, she stared instead to his mother.

Leafpool and Sparkpaw was not there, and Squirrelflight was sharing tongues with Brightheart when she felt Sandstorm and Firestar looking at her. A deep, intense awe fell across the Clan, making Bramblestar to come out from his den.

Squirrelflight stood up, a bit startled, and was about to move, but Sandstorm and Firestar moved first. Padding over, Sandstorm bent her head and Firestar helped her take off the necklace.

Together, Sandstorm and Firestar slung it over Squirrelflight's neck. Pressing her nose to her daughter's, Sandstorm turned around and stared upwards to Bramblestar.

"Thank you." Bramblestar mewed, and Sandstorm inclined her head.

Wordlessly, the two StarClan cats padded upwards to the sky, and as a shooting star shot across, vanished from sight.

Firestar stared upwards, eyes closed blissfully as the cool wind blew against his face.

Faintly he heard Sandstorm join him, sighing in happiness. "It is great Squirrelflight has accepted why Yellowfang did what she did, and to accept that she was having more kits."

Firestar nodded, opening his eyes and swiveling his head to look at Sandstorm properly. He remembered the moment when he had

visited Squirrelflight to have a talk with her as he had promised Bramblestar that.

Squirrelflight had been tight lipped for a moment, but then finally poured everything out. She was very happy that she had Bramblestar's kits, but somehow inside she wasn't. She still didn't know why Yellowfang had done what she did, and her stress was added for she was a deputy.

Furthermore, she was having kits again.

Firestar had calmed her down and spoken to her, and finally Squirrelflight managed to accept what was happening at last. Firestar had then visited Bramblestar again in a dream to tell him that everything was alright.

Sandstorm laid on Firestar, and Firestar bent his head to lick her cheek affectionately. "Well, I guess we'll just need to live out the rest of the days together." He said softly.

Sandstorm purred, "Yap. Does that sound bad?"

"Definitely not!"

"We're so old, Firestar," she sighed.

"Many younger ones have gone to StarClan before us, Sandstorm. We are lucky to have lived this long," Firestar mewed softly. "Graystripe's the only one."

Sandstorm purred, and then they both sat up quite suddenly when there was a yowl of surprise in the woods.

Spottedleaf appeared, breaking through the undergrowth. Her muscles bunched up, she turned around and teased, "Can't catch me!"

Firestar cocked his head. "Who?"

A tom cat, pelt the colour of black under the trees' shade, skidded into the clearing. Eyes sparkling, his only focus was on Spottedleaf. "You sneaky little thing!" He purred, running towards her.

"Wait..." Sandstorm trailed off, looking at Firestar.

"Is that...?" Firestar said, catching what Sandstorm was talking about.

"StarClan! Spottedleaf, you never told me-"

"Come on! Let's follow," Firestar purred, running where Spottedleaf and the tom had vanished in their game of chase.

Purring, Sandstorm ran with him.

As Firestar ran with Sandstorm, a deep sensation of calmness started spreading through his body. This was definitely what he expected on his stay at StarClan...

"Perfect," Firestar mewed.

"Perfect," echoed Sandstorm.

Author's Note:

For the tom... I guess you'll just have to guess! (Does that make sense? XD)

~Jayhow

Author's Note

Hey guys!

Well, here's the end of the book.

Many thanks to those who have kept up with this book, voting, and commenting. I really really appreciate it. I hope you had a wonderful journey when reading this book, because I had a great time writing it for you guys :)

If you have any questions about the plot, you can either message me or comment on the chapters / here. I will be sure to read it, and will try making the story/chapter more clearer for you. Don't worry.

Thank you!

Yours,

~Jayhow

PS: You can always comment / message me if you would like to talk. I'm open! :) I have written two other fanfics Jayfeather & Half Moon/Briarlight and Fireheart & Cinderpelt/Sandstorm. If you wish, do check it out! I may also write more fanfics of Warriors, so... stay alert!